

TWO GRAFFITI FROM BUTKARA I, SWAT (PAKISTAN)*

1. *A graffito representing a standing Buddha in abhayamudrā*

This fragment of green schist (chlorite schist), with the figure of a Buddha engraved on it, was discovered in the Sacred Area of Butkara I, that was excavated by the IsMEO Italian Archaeological Mission¹ (Figs. 1-3)². It was found in square CSB, layer 1; and its

* The two notes which follow are offered to Grigorij Bongard-Levin by Domenico Faccenna and Maurizio Taddei respectively, by way of good wishes in the hope that the two graffiti, illustrated here, may be accepted as a sign of friendship.

For Domenico Faccenna this friendship goes as far back as 1968, to the occasion of the First International Conference on the History, Archaeology and Culture of Central Asia in the Kushan Period, that was held in Dushanbe, during which Grigorij Bongard-Levin and his colleagues became his first guides on the journey through those fascinating Central Asian regions.

Maurizio Taddei, who also became a firm friend many years ago, is happy to recall the evenings in New Delhi when Grigorij brilliantly and ably combined his wisdom as an orientalist with a playful and subtle irony that came from a long, hard experience of life.

D.F. - M.T.

¹ D. FACCENNA, *Butkara I (Swāt, Pakistan) 1956-1962*. IsMEO Reports and Memoirs, III 1-5, Rome, 1980-1981.

² From the negative resin cast made by Miss F. Callori di Vignale, a positive plaster cast and the drawing were made.

number is 3025 in the inventory; measurements: height 0.155, width 0.055, max. thickness 0.03. It is now kept in the Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif.

The fragment was part of the smooth shaft of a small column, on whose curved surface the graffito was scratched. The smooth back surface is flat. The column's dimension and workmanship very closely resemble the type of column employed in some of the other monuments (nos. 14, 17, 27, 135) in the same sacred area³. As in these monuments, it decorated the first square storey of a *stūpa*. It can probably be dated to the 1st century A.D.

Certain details on the fragment suggest the use to which the column was put; some of them are easy to interpret, others less so. The choice of the curved surface rather than the flat one, which would have been the more obvious choice, makes one think that the graffito was done when the small column was complete and perhaps even in place or, more probably, after the shaft had been displaced but its circumference was still complete, whether in part or for its whole length.

Later, part of it was probably adapted into a semi-convex *sūcī* for a stair-railing⁴. The cut on the flat, back surface, the upper and lower oblique cuts, as well as the marks left by the tool on the edge of the upper cut, made to insert it into an upright piece, belong to this phase. During this alteration the lower part of the right leg of the

³ D. FACCENNA, *Butkara I* ..., cit., p. 241 ff., partic. fig. 83.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 61 ff.; D. FACCENNA, *Saidu Sharif I (Swāt, Pakistan)*, 2. *The Buddhist Sacred Area. The Stūpa Terrace*, IsMEO Reports and Memoirs, XXIII 2. Rome, 1996, Appendix A, 471, pl. 252e-h. This supports the hypothesis that there was a monument with a staircase and railing at Butkara I, of which no other evidence remains. The *sūcī* is irregular with uneven parallel oblique cuts and is exceptionally thick: was it perhaps an unsuccessful attempt? For examples of *sūcīs* in similar situations of re-used material, we can point to the one at Sonkh, Mathura (H. HÄRTEL, *Excavations at Sokh. 2500 Years of a Town in Mathura District*, Berlin, 1993, pp. 86, 305, fig. 6 on p. 308). This, a biconvex section, dated by the inscriptions on one of its minor faces to the age of Kaniška I, was later re-employed in the Huviṣka period and it has an image of Skanda sketched on one of the chipped faces.

figure was lost and parts of the right side of the head and perhaps the *uṣṇīṣa* were damaged as well.

At some time, perhaps before, but more probably after it had been made into a *sūcī*, corrosion damaged the surface of the stone and the graffito on it erasing parts of the figure (right thigh, left side).

The Buddha is shown standing, face on, with his legs slightly apart; his left arm is bent at an angle at the side with his left hand on his hip. The right arm is bent at the side and his open hand is raised to shoulder level, in *abhaya mudrā*. The fingers are shown by vertical parallel grooves and joined at the base by a horizontal line to indicate the palm; another parallel line shows the wrist. The head is rounded. The eyes, which are half closed, are drawn with a semicircular line for the upper eyelids and a straight line for the lower lids, the pointed nose is shown by a slightly concave line, the small closed mouth has two marks above and below representing the lips. On the head, with no indication of hair, the *uṣṇīṣa* is drawn with a semicircular line; a second wider contour ends on the left almost as though it was a first attempt to draw the head, then continued with the shorter stroke inside it.

The body, treated as nude, is obtained with a continuous contour, except for a few breaks and corrections, which encloses it in a flat, empty surface. The only hint of plasticity is suggested by the two lines for the pectoral muscles and perhaps also that on the right forearm.

The treatment of the body, but above all the rounded shape of the head, the half-closed eyes, the small mouth and the high rolled-up *uṣṇīṣa*, reflect the stylistic trends typical of late production, which we have termed "stereometric"; and that can be dated to the 3rd century A.D.⁵

⁵ D. FACCENNA, *Sculptures from the Sacred Area of Butkara I (Swāt, W. Pakistan)*, Parts 2 & 3, IsMEO Reports and Memoirs, II 2-3, Rome, 1962, 1964; D. FACCENNA, "Excavations of the Italian Archaeological Mission (IsMEO) in Pakistan: Some Problems of Gandharan Art and Architecture", in *Central'naja Azija v Kushanskuju épokhu. Trudy Mezhdunarodnoj Konferencii po istorii, arkheologii i kul'ture Central'noj Azii v kushanskuju épokhu*, Dusanbe [...] 1968 g.,

The figure is represented without clothes, or at least there is nothing to suggest clothing. It is not easy to understand this fact which is a peculiar feature of this figure. It may be helpful to recall the much later graffito on a rock near Khapalu, Baltistan (Northern Areas, Pakistan)⁶, which equally represents a frontal Buddha standing in *abhayamudrā*, with his weight resting on the right leg, the left leg slightly to the side, that can be dated to the 7th-10th centuries A.D. Here, too, the figure has no clothes, though there is a finely drawn band around the hips.

In similar, contemporary representations the diaphanous garment clings to the body and leaves it so clearly visible as almost to disappear; in some cases it is only indicated by a few folds that either cross the body or encompass it.

We may point, within these northern regions, to the great rock relief at Naupur near Gilgit⁷, datable to the 7th-8th centuries, as well as to the rock-sculpture of the Bodhisattva Maitreya, at Mulbek, Ladakh, 9th-10th centuries⁸.

This artistic conception reached a highly refined expression in the Kashmiri statue of the standing Buddha in the Cleveland Museum of Art (6th-10th centuries), that is a derivation from the

I, Moskva, 1974, pp. 126-176.; D. FACCENNA, "Note gandhariche, 1. Ricostruzione di un pilastro con *cakra* nell'area sacra di Butkara I (Swāt, Pakistan)", in *Annali, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli*, 44 (1984), pp. 319-338; D. FACCENNA, "Note gandhariche, 2. Sulla ricostruzione di un grande rilievo da Butkara I raffigurante la partenza di Siddhārtha da Kapilavastu", in GH. GNOLI, L. LANCIOTTI (eds.), *Orientalia Josephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, I, pp. 325-41, Serie Orientale Roma, LVI 1, Rome, 1985; D. FACCENNA, "Problemy svjashchennoj buddijskoj arkhitektury i gandharskoj skul'ptury", in *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii*, 2 (1993), pp. 137-152.

⁶ D. E. KLIMBURG-SALTER, *The Silk Route and the Diamond Path. Esoteric Buddhist Art on the Trans-Himalayan Trade Routes*. Exhibition April 28-June 30, 1983, Washington, 1983, p. 20, fig. 2

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22, fig. 4; K. JETTMAR, "The Patolas, Their Governors and Their Successors", in K. JETTMAR (ed.), *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan. Reports and Studies*, 2, Mainz, 1993, pp. 77-122, partic. p. 92.

⁸ D. E. KLIMBURG-SALTER, *op. cit.*, p. 70, fig. 16; R. E. FISHER, "Later Stone Sculpture (ninth-twelfth centuries)", in P. PAL (ed.), *Art and Architecture of Ancient Kashmir*, Marg Publications, Bombay, 1989, pp. 105 ff., partic.p. 119, fig. 4.

post-Gupta style in Northern India⁹. The garment clings lightly to the limbs of his body, modelled as though there was no veil.

This peculiar feature may perhaps be better understood on comprehending the spirit behind the graffiti.

The drawing was rapidly done with quick continuous and broken lines, with repetitions and simplifications; although clumsy, the work nonetheless displays a certain dexterity - as in the turn of the shoulder, the legs, the pectoral muscles, the right forearm, and in the body's balance and proportions - that denotes a not altogether unpractised hand, accustomed to depicting figures. Perhaps the double line around the *uṣṇīṣa* may have been an unfinished, initial attempt to make a correction.

It may be taken to be a sketch or the first phase of a piece of work that might at a later stage have been intended to include, in the final version done on another plaque, other elements such as clothing and details like hair, ears, etc. We can suppose it to be the trial drawing of an apprentice, concentrating on improving his technique and skill.

The hypothesis is supported by where the piece was actually found, a sacred area, that was a centre of artistic production, to which obviously active local workshops of artists/craftsmen (sculptors, painters, etc.) were attached; and more especially by the recovery in this and other sacred areas in Swat (Saidu Sharif I) of analogous examples¹⁰. They are fragments of stone with graffiti or roughly sketched figures on them belonging to the standard repertory of Gandharan art (the Buddha, which is the most often repeated figure, monks, cupids, rosettes). They are isolated trial samples of work, with no figurative context, which were not

⁹ D. E. KLIMBURG-SALTER, *op. cit.*, p. 103, pl. 27; G. FUSSMAN, "Chilas, Hatun et les bronzes bouddhiques du Cachemire", in K. JETTMAR (ed.), *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan. Reports and Studies*, 2, pp. 1-59. Mainz, 1993, partic. p. 50 f., pl. 40.

¹⁰ D. FACCENNA, "Sculptors' Trial Pieces in the Art of Gandhāra", in *East and West*, forthcoming. The article now being printed is part of wider research on the organization of a sculptor's workshop and on the work of the craftsman - from the undressed block being brought from the quarry to its insertion as a finished piece of sculpture on the monument.

therefore intended to become finished pieces of sculpture, but to remain as they were.

A similar type of production can be seen elsewhere, in Gandhāra itself, at Hadda, in the Northern Areas of Pakistan (Thalpan Bridge), at Mathura, in Margiana (Mansur-depe) and to the west in Iran (Persepolis), Egypt (Tell el-Amarna, Deir el-Medina), Greece (Sparta, Athens), and in parts of the Roman world. It is also referred to in the papyri with contracts between teachers and apprentices.

They make up an interesting class of images which have rich shades of meaning that are not always univocal¹¹.

However, we cannot entirely overlook another hypothesis, the one that regards the graffito from Butkara I to be unconnected with any school or workshop but a totally occasional, spontaneous product that belongs to a category of representations, which in very general terms is simply classified as popular art¹². A sketch dashed off - we might suppose - by a visitor to the sacred area, a devotee even though it would have been quicker and more direct to have depicted a clothed representation of the Buddha, in imitation of those in the same sacred area.

On the other hand, we should not see in it an unorthodox representation of the Enlightened One, as it would find no parallel; but it might possibly be the result of a figurative mixture with the partial nudity of a Bodhisattva.

¹¹ The "preliminary sketches" have been excluded from this class, on which the artist worked before beginning the final version, as well as "unfinished" pieces of sculpture, which are in fact real sculptures that were never completed.

¹² These are widespread. They are immediate, spontaneous, messages expressing the most varied range of feelings, moods, thoughts executed by a heterogeneous category of people. These images, sometimes rendered in an infantile way, now pleasing, zestful, caricature-like, satirical, pithy, are always interesting for the psychological aspects and mores they reveal. It forms the subject of some of my current research. The harvest is remarkable - it is enough to mention among others, the examples that have been found at Taxila, in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, at Arikamedu, Kara Tepe, Penjikent, in the kingdom of the Bosphorus, at Persepolis, Dura Europos, Hatra, Ephesos, Delos, Petra, in Egypt, at Sparta, Athens, Mount Iato, Alba Fucens, and particularly at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Rome.

This graffito, like the others found in the same sacred area and at Saidu Sharif I, as well as others recorded, noted elsewhere in other regions to the East and the West, enables us to go into a workshop and to come to know some aspects of its activity, to observe the apprentice who is diligently and painstakingly studying; or else, assuming the alternative hypothesis advanced, that of a spontaneous sketch, a popular expression, to capture the echo of a moment, a rapid reflection of daily life.

D.F.

1. *A probable representation of a Śivaliṅga*

During the research work on the site of Butkara I, a peasants' hut was demolished near the place of the excavation, on the bank of the Jhambil. The Mission felt it was important to examine the building material employed that the demolition had exposed, as quite frequently ancient stonework is incorporated into modern constructions.

One of the schist slabs recovered (0.075 x 0.13 x 0.022) presents on one of its faces a tangle of incised signs; some appear to be haphazard, whereas others were definitely drawn with the intention of representing something; however, the meaning of these latter is obscured not only by the roughness of the drawing but also by the fact that they are superimposed to other casual signs (Figs. 4-5). It is impossible to say to what use the plaque was originally put; but it should be remarked that it presents some rough chisel marks along the edge, which may indicate that the plaque's present shape - an irregular oval - may have been done intentionally rather than by the result of casual damage. The Mission gave the object the inventory number 6210; it is now kept in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale, Rome (Inv. no. 1451).

At the centre of the small slab it may be possible to make out a *liṅga*, without a base, with the upper part (*pūjyabhāga*) rounded and distinguished by a caesura in the form of an overhang (*corona glandis*) from the shaft. The upper part is traversed by two vertical

lines (the one on the right overlaps a much longer and extraneous incised groove that exceeds the contour of the *liṅga*) in which it is perhaps possible to recognize the *brahma-sūtras*. These two lines converge at the vertex of the *liṅga* in an oval element in which it may be possible to make out a face (but totally devoid of features). In this case it would be an *ekamukhaliṅga*.

The extreme poverty of the artefact, even should my hypothesis be accepted, makes any attempt to put it into a historical context aleatory. The profile of the *liṅga* - strongly geometrized and with the upper part rounded and projecting with respect to the shaft - appears to be of a rather ancient type, being similar to the *liṅgas* of Mathura of the Kushan period¹³; also the tiny size of the head compared to the *liṅga* (supposing it is indeed a head) points to a date close to the Kushan period¹⁴, but here the size of the head is, in proportion, even smaller than in any other of the examples I know of.

The *liṅga* is not completely unknown in the Gandharan iconography of Swat. A relief (fragment of a lunette) actually from Butkara I (Inv. no. 1495) shows a Pegasus and two male figures behind whom a *liṅga* seems to emerge¹⁵, that however would seem to be of a different type from the one examined here. If it is indeed a *liṅga*, the document is all the more precious because the stylistic characteristics of the relief - which in no way contradict the typological characteristics of the *liṅga* itself - make it appear to be rather ancient (1st century B.C.)¹⁶. Unfortunately, the scene represented is incomplete and therefore difficult to interpret.

However, this is a case of a representation of a Saivite nature in a context we know to be Buddhist. Here it is not necessary to re-

¹³ E.g. G. KREISEL, *Die Śiva-Bildwerke der Mathurā-Kunst. Ein Beitrag zur frühhinduistischen Ikonographie*, Stuttgart, 1986, figs. 6-9, 15, etc.; cf. G. VON MITTERWALLNER, "Evolution of the *Liṅga*", in M. W. MEISTER (ed.), *Discourses on Śiva*, Philadelphia, 1984, pp. 12-31, partic. p. 20.

¹⁴ Cf., e.g., G. VON MITTERWALLNER, *op. cit.*, pl. 24; G. KREISEL, *op. cit.*, figs. 3a, 13, 15, etc.

¹⁵ D. FACCENNA, *Sculptures from the Sacred Area of Butkara I (Swāt, W. Pakistan)*, Part 3, IsMEO Reports and Memoirs, II 3, Rome, 1964, pl. CDXCIII.

¹⁶ No. 1495 from Butkara I is a reworked piece. The face showing the *liṅga* is the earlier one.

examine the question of the destination of the non-Buddhist images from Gandhāra (images of a domestic cult or figures subordinate to the major Buddhist deities?), since this has been raised more than once¹⁷. Anyhow, the presence of images and inscriptions of a Hindu nature in Buddhist sanctuaries is not a novelty in mediaeval India¹⁸. However it would be in our case, provided the two postulates are true: 1) the *liṅga* under scrutiny is approximately of the Kushan period; 2) it comes from the Buddhist Sacred Area of Butkara I. The second of the two postulates is less sure than the first: there is nothing which prevents us from thinking that the small slab with the *liṅga* on it, if indeed it is a *liṅga*, may have been offered in a shrine close to the Buddhist Sacred Area of Butkara I and not in the Sacred Area itself. Nevertheless, while keeping all these reservations in mind, it may be well to remember from now on the possibility that sooner or later one will encounter syncretic cult manifestations with the presence of Sivaite symbols in Buddhist contexts, even in the Kushan period.

On the other hand, it does not seem to me to be helpful to take into consideration the conspicuous presence of *liṅgas* in the Gandharan area in a later period – it is enough to refer to the recently published specimen from Wanda Shahabkhel¹⁹ – because

¹⁷ E.g. M. TADDEI, "A New Early Śaiva Image from Gandhāra", in J. SCHOTSMANS - M. TADDEI (eds.), *South Asian Archaeology 1983*, vol. II, Naples, 1985, pp. 615-28.; M. TADDEI, "Non-Buddhist Deities in Gandharan Art - Some New Evidence", in M. YALDIZ - W. LOBO (eds.), *Investigating Indian Art. Proceedings of a Symposium [...] held at the Museum of Indian Art Berlin in May 1986*, Berlin, 1987, pp. 349-62.

¹⁸ E.g. H. D. SANKALIA, *The University of Nalanda*, 2nd ed. Delhi, 1972, pp. 162-64; M. TADDEI, "The Mahisamardini image from Tapa Sardar, Ghazni", in N. HAMMOND, (ed.), *South Asian Archaeology*, [1971], pp. 203-13. London, 1973; etc. As regards Swat, the contemporaneous presence of Buddhist and Hindu images in the rock sculptures of the post-Gandharan period has been known for a long time (G. TUCCI, "Preliminary report on an archaeological survey in Swat", in *East and West*, 9/4, 1958, pp. 279-328), but it must be taken back to more modest dimensions, as Anna Filigenzi demonstrates in her work at present in press.

¹⁹ FARID KHAN, "The Ekamukhalinga from Wanda Shahabkhel Northwest Frontier, Pakistan", in *South Asian Studies* 9 (1993), pp. 87-91.

their typology seems to be very far removed from that of our example from Butkara.

Nor can a comparison with the representations of *liṅgas* incised on rock in the neighbourhood of Oshibat, Pakistan Northern Areas²⁰ be of any assistance, because also in this case the formal differences are too great.

M.T.

²⁰ M. BEMMANN D. - KÖNIG, *Die Felsbildstation Oshibat* (Materialen zur Archäologie der Nordgebiete Pakistans, Band, 1), Mainz, 1994, p. 50, no. 17:15, pl. 23; 68, no. 18136, pl. 23.

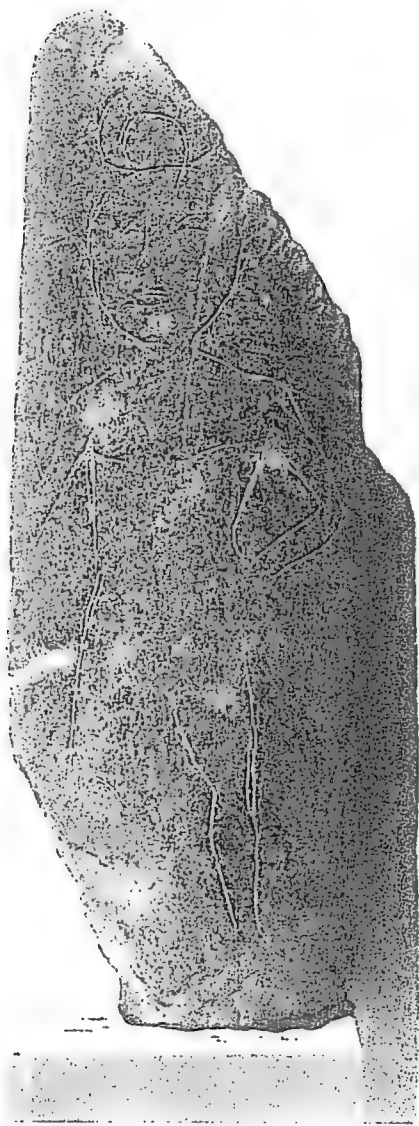


Fig. 1: Butkara I, Inv. no. 3025. Swat Museum, Saidu Sharif (Photo by F. Bonardi Tucci).



Fig. 2: Butkara I, Inv. no. 3025. A moulding from the fragment in fig. 1 (Photo by F. Bonardi Tucci).



Fig. 3: Drawing from the moulding in fig. 2 (by V. Caroli).

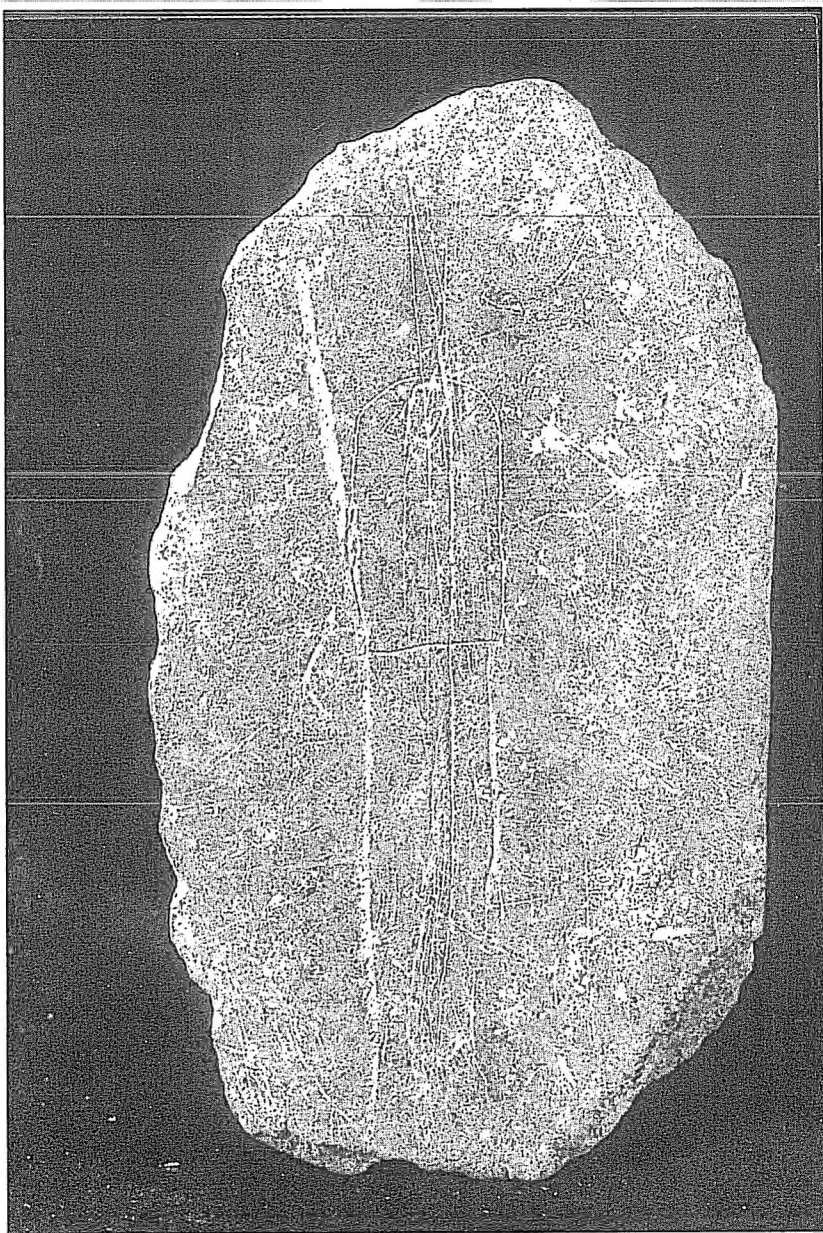


Fig. 4: Butkara I, Inv. no. 6210 Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale, Rome, Inv. no. 1451 (Photo by F. Bonardi Tucci).

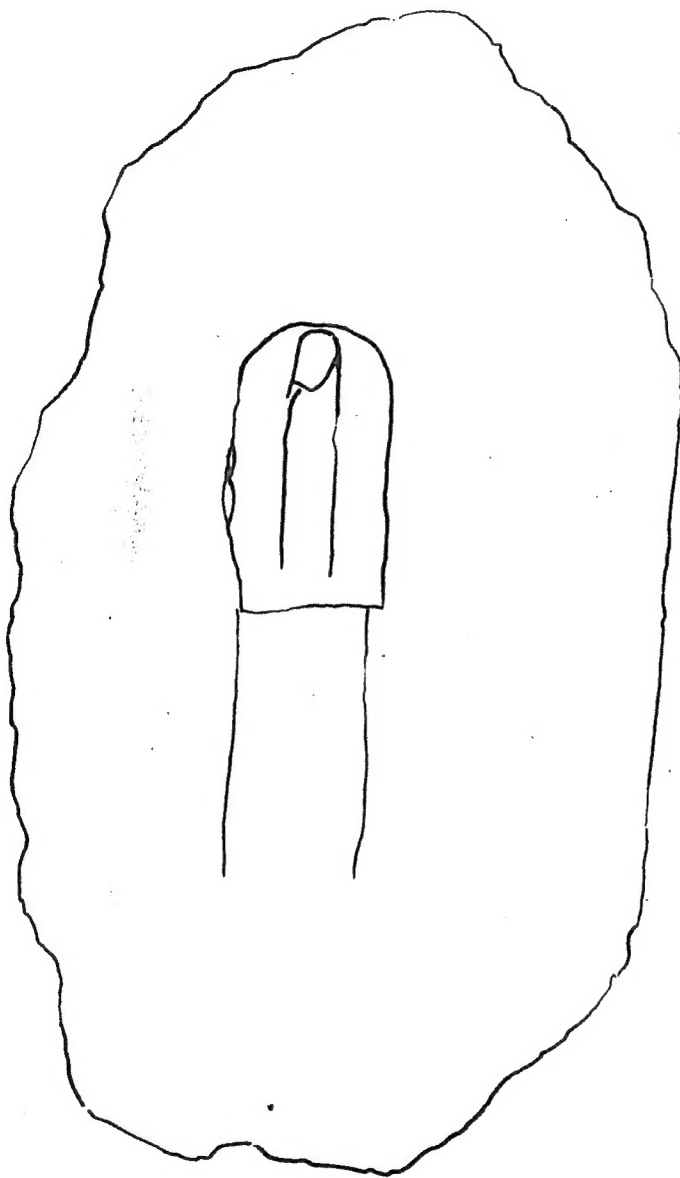


Fig. 5: Drawing from the slab in fig. 4.